

Revealing the Paramatma within

Atmasakshatkar is the actual experience of one's true nature, which is the pure undifferentiated Atma (soul) within us all, or Param-Atma (the Universal Soul/Consciousness), the underlying reality of the entire universe. It is also referred to as "Self Realization". It is a very rare person who has actually experienced Atmasakshatkar because our Atma, our true self, is hidden from our awareness by the five Koshas (coverings) which cover it and make it "separate" from the Paramatma. The diligent practice of Maha Yoga can enable everyone on this earth to remove the five Koshas one by one and experience their true self, the Paramatma – the Universal Consciousness. This short article briefly describes the five Koshas and how can Maha Yoga help a Sadhak clear them and actually experience the Paramatma within.

Most human beings go through life identifying themselves only with their body, which is also called the Annamaya Kosha, i.e. the covering/layer/moat which is supported by the food we eat (Anna). This is the outermost of the five Koshas, and for most of us humans it defines who we are. So we think of ourselves as Dilip Kamat or Mary Smith, defining ourselves as the son or daughter of so- and-so, brother/sister of someone, husband/wife of someone else, etc., etc. Our awareness becomes limited to our physical bodies, and we experience pain or pleasure when our bodies feel it. So we tend to do things that give us physical pleasure and avoid things which can cause us physical pain.

But the Annamaya Kosha, by itself, is inanimate. It is animated by the Kosha within it called the Pranamaya Kosha, which is made up of nervous (Pranic) energy. The Pranamaya Kosha not only animates our bodies to action, it also provides the Pranic energy which runs all the systems within our bodies. Some of us with a lot of nervous energy are hard charging individuals, always on the go, always busy doing something, while others who do not have as much nervous energy tend to be lethargic, with most of us falling between those two extremes. In all these cases, it is the outward-directed Prana Shakti which causes our bodies to act as long as we are alive. And separate from our intentional actions and activities, the Prana Shakti also causes our respiration to happen, our circulatory system to function, the food we eat get digested, our hair and nails to grow, etc., etc. But, even most of us who are aware of the nervous energy within tend to connect it directly with our bodies and do not see the Pranamaya Kosha as a separate layer within the Annamaya Kosha. Only when the normally outwardly-directed Prana Shakti becomes inward-directed with Yogic practices or with Shaktipat (Maha Yoga Deeksha), do we become aware that it is in fact a separate entity within us and which causes activities in the Annamaya Kosha, our bodies, to happen.

A smaller subset of us have an explicit awareness of our mind, which is also called the Manomaya Kosha, which is the layer within the Pranamaya Kosha, and which is made up of the thoughts which constantly arise. These thoughts sometimes drive us to action when we are awake and make up our dreams when we are asleep. Even those of us who are explicitly aware of our minds, tend to think of ourselves as being defined by our bodies, our nervous energy and our minds, i.e. the three outer Koshas which cover our true self, the Atma. These three layers define us as a living entity, with a body, the Prana Shakti animating the body, and a mind. But, these layers contribute to hiding our true self, the Atma, from our awareness.

Excepting for a very small percentage, mostly made up of Yogis, most human beings are completely unaware of the two additional layers within the Manomaya Kosha. The first of these is the Vignyanamaya Kosha, or the layer of the "intellect". It is the "hard-drive" which holds the Sanchit

Samskaras, the accumulated impressions from all our past lives and our current one. These accumulated impressions are the cause for why thoughts arise in our minds in the first place, and which cause us to act or think in a certain manner. This layer is the cause for why we are born with certain specific tendencies; why some people are born musicians, or born yogis, born rational thinkers, born with certain likes/dislikes etc., etc. As we accumulate new Samskaras (impressions) in our current lives, it is in this layer that those Samskaras reside. And after we leave our current physical body and get born into another one, this “hard drive” layer and the innermost layer within which the Atma resides, migrate to the next body. But again, the Vignyanamaya Kosha is not our true self; it only serves to hide it.

The innermost layer covering the Atma is called the Anandmaya Kosha or the “illuminated” layer. It separates the Atma from the Param-Atma, and defines us as separate from the Paramatma. It is the layer which gives each of us, even Yogis, the sense of separateness from everything and everyone else. It is called the Anandmaya Kosha because when all the other Koshas have been eliminated, it is what results in the bliss experienced by Yogis who have reached that state. In that sense it also has the potential to trap the Yogi in that blissful, but separate, state as an individual Atma. It continues to maintain the sense of duality in the Yogi as a separate entity from the non-dual Paramatma. Only when the Anandmaya Kosha gets eliminated does the separate Atma merge with the Param-Atma and Atmasakshatkar happens.

So, Atmasakshatkar is the experiential merger of one’s Atma into the Paramatma. It can be a long process that begins by having the Prana Shakti become inward-directed, by years of Yogic practices or instantly, through Maha Yoga Shaktipat Deeksha (initiation). Once that happens, the Sadhak becomes aware of the separateness of the Prana Shakti within from his awareness of himself as simply a body animated by Prana and perhaps with an awareness of his mind. With regular Maha Yoga Sadhan, the Sadhak begins gradually to achieve a Sakshi (observer) state, allowing the awakened and inward-directed Prana Shakti within to bring up the Sanchit Samskaras from within his Vignyanamaya Kosha into his awareness. These Samskaras get manifested as Kriyas (involuntary physical/Pranic/mental activities and actions) during Maha Yoga Sadhan. By surrendering to the awakened Prana Shakti within and allowing her to make the Kriyas happen while dispassionately observing the Kriyas as the Samskaras get expressed through them, the accumulated Samskaras get gradually erased from the hard drive of the Vignyanamaya Kosha. Simultaneously, the Sadhak will also develop a Sakshi state not just during Sadhan but also in his day-to-day life. He will see the inward-directed and awakened Prana Shakti as the “doer” and himself as simply the “observer”.

Gradually, as the Sadhak develops the detached attitude of a Karma Yogi, new Samskaras will stop being created and accumulated, resulting eventually in the Vignyanamaya Kosha getting completely cleared. This is when the Sadhak will experience a state of blissful Samadhi as his awareness moves to the Anandmaya Kosha, but it will be a Savikalpa Samadhi state. However, with continued Sadhan, even the Anandmaya Kosha will get erased and he will experience Atmasakshatkar, eventually leading to the Nishpatti state and complete merger of his Atma with the Paramatma. Even though the Sadhak in this state might be alive in his body, his awareness will only be that of the Paramatma; he will be completely indifferent to his body and mind. And after his body dies, even the physical manifestation of his separateness from the Paramatma will have ended, he having become one with the Paramatma.

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